

Linda Clair
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File 2c – Thursday morning discussion

Linda: So this is your chance to ask me anything. I used to have private sessions during retreats and I stopped having the private sessions, because it became in a way quite repetitive. And everyone felt that they were the only ones feeling resistance, feeling certain things. When I stopped having the private sessions people were actually forced to be a bit more open and express themselves during these discussion – question and answer– periods. And it brought everyone closer and made people feel much less isolated. So during the retreat gradually, gradually, people start to feel less separate and more part of this group. And I know when I was younger I never really wanted to be part of a group, I always wanted to be separate and special. And through this practice at first I did feel in a way I was going to become more special, but then I realised the relief and the ecstasy was being completely ordinary, not feeling separate or special at all. So please don't feel that anything, or almost anything I suppose, is too private or personal. Because you'd be surprised how many people are feeling exactly the same thing, and it can really help people to hear that they're not the only one feeling something.

Question: I don't really know but I think that for so much of my life I've dealt with so much trauma – physical and emotional trauma, through my body – and since I started this process with you four years ago I think that for the first time you gave me some hope that maybe things would get easier. And through the journey in the last couple of years they've been going better, to where I'm finally strong enough to live this life. And then the whole last year my life – and my husband's a paraplegic– and I just feel that after all this work I'm bitter and angry. It's more challenges. I feel like I get over one challenge and it just gets bigger and bigger and I feel as if the universe keeps saying. "No, you think you're getting stronger but I'm going to give you more and more." I'm almost fifty-nine years old. I don't know how much more I have in me and I feel angry at the universe. And it just keeps getting harder.

Linda: Well, it does. I prefer to say more challenging. So I never said it was going to get easier and I never say that to anyone because it doesn't. And why should things be easy? We have this attitude – I'm not saying you in particular – but most people want things to be easy. But you really don't appreciate things when they're easy. When they are more challenging what this teaches you to do is rise to that challenge. And of course you feel at times as you do – a lot of anger will come up. And really it's all the anger that you've been repressing for most of your life coming up. Every time you repress something there is a bit of resentment and bitterness and anger there. So in a way everyone has gone through some sort of trauma, and that's why we're here. So it's not a competition to see who's had the most trauma, but of course I know the last year for you in particular has been particularly difficult. But what can you do except accept the situation? And each time you feel that anger what can you do? Feel it, come back to your body, don't try and repress it. This is all about taking complete responsibility for how you feel without blaming a situation, however tempting and

however much you might feel justified in feeling that anger. Really all you can do is as much as possible accept this situation.

But no, it doesn't get easier. And even after realisation it's certainly not easier, but the challenge becomes incredibly exciting rather than just awful, at times. So yes, bitterness, it's a horrible emotion to feel. And you don't want to be eighty and still feeling bitter. So this is your chance to become free of that. But it's not easy.

So use this next few days to really just sit; accept as much as possible; be in your body. Try not to expect to feel better, or anything in particular. But you will feel the effect of this afterwards.

Question: Back in May in Oxford you briefly said one or two things about pain that appeared like you have a positive attitude about pain. As a person with quite a lot of arthritis I've struggled to find much positive to say about pain. And I wondered if you'd speak a bit more about your relationship with pain and what one's supposed to do with it?

Linda: Well, leading up to realisation I started to see that pain, particularly when I was sitting, and that's when I really felt pain, particularly during long periods of meditation. I'd feel pain in different parts of my body. When I first started seriously feeling it it was a real shock. You know, "Shouldn't be like this. What the hell is this?" Because as soon as I'd open my eyes it'd be gone. The residual shock would still be there at times, but the pain would just go. And I started to see that the pain was actually forcing me to stay present. It wasn't that I was enjoying it at all. I developed this love-hate relationship with it where I sort of craved it. And it felt weird craving it because it started to feel like I was some sort of masochist. But I could feel that it was forcing me to be present and forcing the past out of my body. So it's when a lot of energy comes into your body – and I'm talking about sitting more than a physical ailment, although it is relevant – as you start to open up and the energy comes in it does meet blocks and that's what the pain is.

And if you can sit with that pain, as I said, it keeps you more present but it also challenges you. You start to see that you do have these limits where you go, "I'll put up with this, but not this." So eventually I started challenging myself and going, "Well, if I can sit for an hour like this what would happen if I sat for two hours? And why aren't I sitting for longer? Is it because I'm scared or what?" So I stated to challenge myself in that way and I saw that the pain wasn't purely physical pain, it was the emotional pain that I'd been repressing and avoiding for most of my life and it was manifesting in my body at times, not all the time, as this intense physical pain.

I saw it as something to really work with, something very tangible. I couldn't pretend it wasn't there. It was really incredibly strong at times, so I used it. So it became my teacher, but it didn't mean that I enjoyed it or could always accept it. I longed for it and then when it came on really strongly I just wanted it to go away, so I'd just work with that resistance. But it gradually raised my pain threshold, and it wasn't just my physical pain threshold but the emotional pain threshold. And what I started to see was that quite a large degree of the physical pain that I might feel in my daily life in my body, not that I had anything particularly wrong with me, a large component of that was emotional. And my emotional pain would manifest as physical pain – it would be like that. So I'm not saying every ailment is emotional. Of course we get older we get arthritis and different things wrong with us, but a degree of that pain probably is emotional too. And that's what this forces you to see.

So when you're sitting and you do have some sort of physical weakness it often will become more intense, because you'll start to see the fear associated with that pain more intensely. So in that way you can use it. And there will be this fear at times that if I sit any longer – well essentially, I'm going to die or it will get worse. But if you can challenge yourself, and do that at times, I'm not saying every time, it can be incredibly powerful. You start to feel this deep power within you where the limits that you placed on yourself through fear start to dissolve. And you start to see that *anything* is possible. And I'm not saying physically – it's not like you can suddenly fly or something like that – but you start to see how much fear has dominated your life and restricted your behaviour and ruled your behaviour. And you start to see this by using this pain that you feel when you're actually sitting in a situation like this. And it will intensify in a situation like this because you're doing longer periods, more concentrated periods of sitting without the distractions of daily life or responsibilities. You're totally here. There's nothing really you need to be thinking about – everything is provided. Also, it intensifies when you're in a group, particularly of mature meditators, who are grounding the energy and so intensifying that resistance, making it much clearer. So it's a perfect situation to practice in. I'm not saying you should practice in a situation like this all the time. I feel it's good to have periods like this and then go home and test it in your daily life and see how things have changed in you. And you'll see that in day-to-day situations dealing with physical ailments, dealing with people, particularly with your family, things like that.

Question: What is the purpose of hugging a pillow to your belly?

Linda: It's really just sitting there, simply to stop your shoulders from dropping. Stops them getting a bit tense and dropping down. So, nothing mystical, just a physical thing to help you sit.

Question: It seems to me that relationships, or attachments from the past, that are like promises into the future – as your mind stops thinking are relationships even possible?

Linda: It's a great question. In a sense, yes. The truth is there are no relationships, there's just this. But in the worldly sense of course they are possible. But the reason for having relationships changes, so the intention behind any sort of relationship changes. So in a sense in this state there are no relationships. But my teacher said once, "Love is what makes existence bearable." So it's not like you become this isolated being sitting on a mountain going, "I am enlightened." It's not that at all. In fact a much deeper state is, I feel, when you combine the two, when you see that the relative is part of the absolute. The absolute is not absolute; it *contains* the relative. And that is a very beautiful state to be in, to be able to be in the relative, to be in love, to combine that relationship while in this absolute state and not separate the two, and say, "There's the absolute and the relative." But the motivation behind having relationships with people changes, with anything really. So it's not from need or fear, fear of being alone, fear of anything.

Question: Becomes more a sharing?

Linda: Yeah, the pure pleasure of being with someone. And why not? Without that incredible attachment and fear that you're going to lose them – the same with anything, possessions, anything else. It doesn't mean you don't want to do pleasurable things at times but you just see pleasure for what it is. It's just pleasure that's going to come and go, the same as people. So once that fear is out of the way you can really be in this incredibly beautiful relationship without the fear and the neediness, the anxiety, the jealousy. And you're just here.

Question: I'm thinking that we are all putting in a lot of energy into whatever we're doing with the mind. When you get over that hill so that not thinking becomes easier than thinking, you must release all this energy?

Linda: No, you don't release it.

Question: No, I mean does it free it up? Does it go into new forms of creativity or whatever?

Linda: Yes, so in the end – not that there's any end, but the end of suffering – it is effortless. It's like you suddenly become free and it's just completely effortless. It doesn't mean it's easy and it doesn't mean that there are no challenges, but the challenges become incredibly exciting and desirable. In fact as soon as you start to feel too comfortable there is this longing, well in me, I can only talk for me, there is this longing for another challenge. Like being here – it'd be much easier for me to stay in Australia and do the retreats there. It's a great place to be, rather than spending twenty-four hours on a plane. But I love this and it's great, and it's great being around people who maybe I don't know as well – new people, new environment. And you need to do that for the creative energy to keep flowing, rather than getting into a very comfortable situation. But often you do go over one hill and you see another one. But that's the excitement and the challenge. You start to enjoy going up the hill, rather than see it as an obstacle.

Question: I'd like to know in the walking why you put the toe down first. (This question not transcribed as a repetition.)

Question: I found the first few sessions yesterday were really amazing and I felt this was one of the best things I think I've done, and still do. But I cried this morning too, and I never cry. Not really allowed to cry, got to be the rock at home. And emotions go so deep, to the core, and so powerful. But I'm not really sure what to do with it really, because it doesn't feel very good. I think I've got a lifetime of anxiety to work through. There're various things which I'm worrying about at the moment, doubts. But I felt this is different for me, because I don't cry, I don't let anything out. So this morning I was thinking this is not really helping, this emotion, so I was thinking, "Maybe just don't dwell on it, put it away, put it back."

Linda: No, that's what you've been doing for most of your life. So I would say if you feel to cry, particularly if you hardly ever cry, just cry. I had never cried so much as during my practice, and there were times – usually I would go away and cry by myself in my room. But there's no rules saying don't cry, so cry. If you really feel to cry, cry. The emotions are going to come up, everything that you've been repressing for most of your life needs to come up and needs to be seen. What this practice does – it's not about repressing emotions, saying, "Emotion's bad, I shouldn't feel emotional." You're going to feel more emotional than ever doing this and probably not very good at times. In fact probably pretty crappy at times, so allow them to come up. But what this is all about is using the body to become reasonably stable so you can cope with the emotions that are going to arise, inevitably are going to arise, in everyone. And I'd say to a degree everyone in this room at some time will feel like crying, will feel very emotional. You're not alone and you have to realise that you're not alone in feeling what you're feeling.

Question: When I feel the emotion it just takes me completely.

Linda: It will.

Question: So I'm not here, I'm not in my body. And so it feels that I can't be centred at all. And it feels as though, you know those types of thoughts, which may be negative thoughts, which stirs up the emotions and keeps it going. You just feel, "Well, shouldn't I just deal with this? It's just negative emotions, which are of no value. Just focus on trying to be present." I guess I can go one way or the other, I can go to my emotions and break down, or I can just try to stay sitting.

Linda: Well, there's a balance. So you can still sit and feel incredibly emotional. And I would suggest – what I would do was get really emotional at times, I'd just allow it to happen. I didn't have any choice really because it would be so strong at times there was nothing I could do. And then there would come a point where I'd go, "Okay, I'll let it go and keep going." But yeah, it's a tricky balance and there's no perfect way to deal with it. There's no perfect way to deal with this. But particularly if they're that strong, and you haven't got a history of crying and allowing yourself to be emotional, let it go. Use this period to allow yourself to be vulnerable. Particularly for a lot of men, and I know women too, who are used to feeling that they have to take responsibility for job, family, all that sort of stuff. Even now men are still not supposed to cry as much as women. We're allowed to more but men not so much, even now. So don't worry about it. Just let yourself cry.

Question: The instruction, when you're in la-la-land of the thoughts, to come back to your body – that instruction has a sense. But then on reflection, I'm not clear whether you return to awareness of your body or you return to your body with awareness of everything? Or is even that question overthinking?

Linda: No, it's a good question, and it's really good to get as clear as possible about the practice. It's a basic simple practice but I've talked to people who've been doing it for years and they suddenly ask a question and it's obvious they haven't *quite* understood it, because it *is* tricky.

So it's not really awareness of anything, it's *feeling*. So *feeling* sensations in the body. When we say awareness – what does that mean? It's a fairly nebulous sort of thing. And it's more the base, primitive sensations, basic sensations that you feel. When you're sitting for periods you're probably going to feel uncomfortable, tension, maybe pain in certain parts of your body. When it is painful it's very uncomfortable but it's actually taking the choice out of, "Do I feel my body or not?" because I'm here feeling it. So there's no question about being in your body. But when you're in la-la-land and feeling a bit hazy you do have to make more of an effort to come back. So come back, use this (indicating abdomen) not as your focus but as your anchor, your home base where you come back to. And it's more a movement of the abdomen, it's going in and out as your body is breathing. So *feel* the sensation *in* your body as much as you can, and keep doing that. Use whatever sensation is dominant but this is like your home base, where you keep coming back to. It will be really difficult at times, and other times it will be incredible, it will be almost effortless. Is that clearer?

Question: Yes, I think so. I wanted to check.

Linda: Yeah, it's good to check. So check and don't feel that any question is too simple. We're all in a way – everyone is a beginner. If you don't see yourself as a beginner you're probably deluded. ☺ So don't feel you're boring anyone with any sort of question because I'd say it will help clarify it for everyone. So that's why the pain became so important. When I felt that I didn't have to do anything except sit there and feel it. There was no perfect way to deal with it. I know I felt like maybe I wasn't dealing with it properly but it just took over and kept me here. And you really have to be

forced in the end to be here. You don't go willingly, even though you're here willingly there'll still be this incredible resistance there at times where you go, "I don't want to be here, I want to be somewhere else." And that's the habit. So the most ecstatic thing that one can feel really is to not want to be anywhere else but here. I'm here. It's amazing. I'm here with you. There's nowhere else in the world I'd rather be – nowhere. So if you can say that wherever you are, whatever is happening, however uncomfortable it is, it's the most amazing thing. That is what acceptance is.

So just keep coming back to where you are. Use anything you can. The counting can also be really good – can be quite difficult at times to do it. Particularly if you can do it for a whole sitting do that. It does add that extra anchor and after a sitting where you have been counting you can feel particularly clear.